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ABSTRACT

This study investigated links between recalled attachment to parents and current parenting attitudes of 126 parents of elementary school children. Mean age of subjects was 36.3 years; average length of marriage was 13 years. The majority of subjects had not experienced disruption in early attachment relationships or parental marital disharmony. Epstein's (1983) Mother-Father-Peer Scale (MFP) was used to assess recalled attachment relationship between subjects and their parents. The MFP consisted of two subscales. One indicated the degree to which a subject's mother, father, and peers were reported to have been accepting versus rejecting. The other measured the degree to which the subject's mother and father were reported to have been overprotective versus supportive of independence. Parental attitudes toward child rearing were assessed using two scales developed by Itkin (1952). The first measured parental attitudes toward children along an acceptance-rejection continuum. The second assessed parental attitudes about the control of children along a strict-permissive continuum. Outcomes of correlation analysis suggested that subjects were not making a significant distinction between memories of attachment by sex of parent. Only the variable of maternal encouragement of independence was found to be significantly related to a present attitude favoring strict control of children. (RH)

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THE RECALLED QUALITY OF CHILDHOOD RELATIONSHIPS AS RELATED TO PARENTING ATTITUDES*

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Variables which influence parenting styles and attitudes continue to be of interest to family researchers. Within the plethora of studies on parent-child relations, the issue of intergenerational continuity of parenting attitudes is just beginning to be addressed. Minuchin (1985) stated: ". . . what has not yet been investigated, however, is the extent to which parent interaction serves as a model of adult behavior for the child" (p. 297). Sroufe and Fleeson (1986) hypothesized that in the course of continuous interaction, individuals learn or internalize the dual nature of the parent-child relationship. Sroufe and Fleeson postulated that a child who has learned to trust parents to give needed emotional support, will be able to assume a nurturing role upon becoming a parent. The present study focused on the link between recalled attachment to parents and current parenting attitudes.

Data was collected on 126 parents of elementary school children. Subjects were solicited from after school care programs and adult Sunday school classes. For the total sample (N = 126), the mean age of the subjects was 36.3 years. The average length of marriage was 13 years. The majority of subjects (51.6%) had two children. Most (94.4%) reported that their own parents were married during the greater part of their childhood. The demographics for couples (n = 40) and individuals from different families (n = 86) were similar to those reported for the total sample.

As previously reported, 94.4% of the subjects in the study indicated that their own parents were married during most of their childhood. This study utilized the question, "what was your parents' marital status during most of your childhood?" to assess this variable. This finding

was assumed to indicate that the majority of subjects had not experienced either disruption in early attachment relationships or parental marital disharmony.

Epstein's (1983) Mother-Father-Peer Scale (MFP) was used to assess the recalled attachment relationship between the subjects and their own parents. This measure consisted of 56 statements to which the respondent was given five Likert choices ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Subjects were asked to indicate their magnitude of agreement with these statements in regard to their childhood relationship with each of their parents as well as peers.

The MFP consisted of two subscales. The first subscale indicated the degree to which a subject's mother, father and peers were reported to have been accepting versus rejecting. Acceptance indicated that the parent communicated love, acceptance, and appreciation of the child whereas scores in the rejection range indicated the parent had treated the child as a burden, nuisance or as a source of unhappiness (Epstein, 1983). The second subscale measured the degree to which a subject's mother and father were reported to have been independence-encouraging versus overprotecting. The independence-encouraging dimension measured the degree to which a parent had encouraged and accepted the child's independence and self-reliance whereas the overprotecting dimension indicated the degree to which a parent had been overprotective and failed to help the child to function independently.

This measure allowed for the testing of the recalled relationship to mothers and fathers separately as opposed to testing the total parental relationship. This was in line with Bretherton's (1985) contention

that parental relationships should be assessed separately as subjects' feelings may differ for mother and father. Thus, the scales of measurement for the MFP used in this study were as follows: maternal accepting versus rejecting (MAR), paternal accepting versus rejecting (PAR), maternal independence-encouraging versus overprotecting (MIEO), paternal independence-encouraging versus overprotecting (PIEO), and peer accepting versus rejecting (PEER). Reliabilities for the different subscales were reported to range from .82 to .93 (Epstein, 1983).

Each item choice was assigned a weight ranging from one to five. Scoring procedures used were those given by Epstein (1983). A high score on the subscales indicated accepting and independence-encouraging behavior whereas a low score indicated rejecting and overprotective behavior.

Parental attitudes toward child rearing were assessed using two scales developed by Itkin (1952). The first scale titled, "A Survey of Opinions Regarding the Bringing Up of Children," was designed to measure parental attitudes toward children along an Acceptance-Rejection continuum. The second scale, "A Survey of Opinions Regarding Discipline of Children," was used to assess parental attitudes involving the control of children along a Strict-Permissive continuum.

The acceptance-rejection attitude scale (AR) consisted of 30 items: 26 Likert-type items and 4 multiple choice questions. The strict-permissive scale (SP) contained 31 Likert-type items and 4 multiple choice items. Split-half reliability of .92 for the acceptance-rejection scale and .97 for the strict -permissive scale was reported (Shaw & Wright, 1967).

Each item choice was assigned a weight ranging from one to five. A weight of five was assigned to "strongly disagree" for negatively

worded statements and to "strongly agree" for positively worded statements. The attitude score was the sum of the item scores. The theoretical range for the acceptance-rejection scale was from 30 to 150. A high score indicated a more favorable attitude toward acceptant, positive treatment of children. The possible range for the strict-permissive scale from was 35 to 17. A high score indicated an attitude favoring strict control of children.

Hotelling's T^2 test showed no significant differences between husband and wife pairs, as compared with individual husband and wife respondents on the variables. Canonical correlation analysis which examined the relationship between the parental attitude variables and recalled qualities of childhood relationships was not significant. Multiple regression analysis were also not significant. Pearson product moment correlations were used to determine the interrelationship between all the variables. These results are reported in Table 1.

Examination of the correlation matrix revealed several significant correlations within the subscales (Table 1). In regard to the question of differential attachment to ones' parents raised by Bretherton (1985), it was found that the components of recalled quality of parental relations (maternal/paternal independence-encouragement versus overprotection and maternal/paternal acceptance versus rejection) were significantly related. These correlations were interpreted as an indication that subjects were not making a significant distinction between memories of attachment to parent based on sex of parent.

The focus of the study was whether the recalled quality of attachment to one's parent was related to adult parenting attitudes. In regard

to subjects' recalled quality of childhood relationships and their present parenting attitude, only the variable of maternal independence encouraging was found to be related to a present attitude favoring strict control of children ($r = .16$, $p < .05$). Based on a median split of the theoretical ranges on the parenting scales, subjects were classified as falling into the authoritarian-reciprocal quadrant of Maccoby and Martin's (1983) model of parenting styles. The subjects' memories of childhood relationships were also skewed toward the positive side of these scales. It could be suggested that the lack of empirical support was due to positive childhood memories which possibly translated into the adult ability to provide positive parenting. Further study with a more diverse sample in regard to recalled memories of childhood relationships and parenting attitudes would be necessary to support this hypothesis.

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Table 1

Pearson Correlation Matrix

Variable	SP	MIEO	PIEO	MAR	PAR	PEER Accepting versus Rejecting
Acceptance Rejection (AR)	-.22**	-.02	-.01	-.04	.06	.07
Strict Permissive (SP)		.16*	-.01	.11	.04	.03
Maternal Independence Encouraging versus Overprotecting (MIEO)			.50**	.44**	.15*	.28**
Paternal Independence Encouraging versus Overprotecting (PIEO)				.23**	.50**	.28**
Maternal Accepting versus Rejecting (MAR)					.31**	.26**
Paternal Accepting versus Rejecting (PAR)						.30**

*$p < .05$

**$p < .01$

$N = 126$